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By: Staff Sgt. Karima Turner

### **Soldiers on path to success at National Guard Patriot Academy**

**MUSCATATUCK URBAN TRAINING CENTER, Ind.**—People face challenges every day, some more difficult than others, but regardless of what those challenges are or where they originate from, how they deal with them defines a person.

In an effort to overcome various personal and academic challenges head-on, three young Soldiers of the Alaska Army National Guard and cadets at the National Guard Patriot Academy at the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center, Ind., are nearing completion of at least one of the steps to success: receiving their high school diplomas.

Pfc. Michael David Huff, of Anchorage; Pvt. Evan Dancer, of Eagle River; and Pvt. Tylor Dolfi, of Sutton, started their journey to success at the Alaska Military Youth Academy (AMYA). Upon successful graduation from AMYA in 2010, the three enlisted in the Alaska Army National Guard, then they all requested to enroll in the National Guard Patriot Academy.

"I found out about the Patriot Academy through my recruiter after I graduated from the Alaska Military Youth Academy," said Pvt. Evan Dancer, National Guard Patriot Academy cadet and student first sergeant. "He gave me the idea that it would be good for me to get my high school diploma, so I asked him about the National Guard Patriot Academy and decided it was a great idea. We filled out the paperwork, I got accepted and I came here after basic training."

According to the National Guard Patriot Academy's official website, the academy is a pilot program of the National Guard Bureau that gives qualified high school dropouts the opportunity to join the National Guard, earn their high school diploma, give back to the community and even earn college credit for some of their courses. The amount of time cadets spend at the academy depends on how many credits they need to earn their high school diploma.

"The thing that motivated me the most is that I'll be one of three people in my family, out of nine brothers and sisters, to actually have my high school diploma," Dancer said. "I'm getting ready, on the right track and actually getting a head start on changing my life."

Although the Soldiers have been given many opportunities to make positive changes toward brighter futures, the command sergeant major of the academy, Command Sgt. Maj. Steven Ridings, said certain qualities are integral to their success at the academy.

"I can tell you that what we hope for from all of our Soldiers is professional character, to do the best they can and to live by the Army values on a daily basis," Ridings said. "When you see Pfc. Huff or Pvt. Dolfi or Pvt. Dancer, they are absolutely the epitome of that. All three were chosen to be mentors, and that's a testament to the people they are, to the character and the professional ethics that they live by."

All three of the Soldiers see the value in leadership ability and said they have grown from their experiences at the National Guard Patriot Academy.

"I feel like the cadre is here for us, and the biggest thing I want to do is lead by example," Huff said. "I want to show others the way because it's the Army of the future, and we're going to need leaders who are going to step up and actually lead by example."

The cadets also said that while the National Guard Patriot Academy is a wonderful opportunity that others should take advantage of, a strong will to succeed is necessary.

"The Patriot Academy produces an environment where you can grow as a person, it gives you that can-do attitude," Dolfi said. "When you get here after basic, you think you are really cool, and then the cadre tell you how long you might be here and it's like, 'wow.' It's a really big elephant to chew, so I just look at the light at the end of the tunnel, the reward, and take it one day at a time."

While the Soldiers still have varying amounts of time before earning their high school diplomas, they're all on track for doing so by the end of the summer.

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From left: Pfc. David Huff, of Anchorage; Pvt. Tylor Dolfi, of Sutton; and Pvt. Evan Dancer, of Eagle River, stand proudly in front of the National Guard Patriot Academy at the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center, Ind., in February. The three Alaska Army National Guardsmen are attending the National Guard Patriot Academy and are currently on track to earn their high school diplomas by the end of the summer. Photo by: Staff Sgt. Karima Turner, Alaska National Guard Public Affairs